

APPENDIX

Sabbath

Sabbath, Hebrew **Shabbat**, (from *shavat*, “cease,” or “desist”), day of holiness and rest observed by Jews from sunset on Friday to nightfall of the following day. The time division follows the biblical story of creation: “And there was evening and there was morning, one day” (Genesis 1:5).

The sacredness of the Sabbath has served to unite Jews during the long course of their history and has been for them a joyous reminder of their perpetual Covenant with God. The prophets, nevertheless, often found it necessary to remind the Jews of God’s commandment to keep holy the Sabbath. Since abstention from work was fundamental to Sabbath observance, God miraculously provided a double portion of manna (“bread from heaven”) on Friday so that the Israelites would not be compelled to gather food on the Sabbath during their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness.

In Maccabean times (2nd century BC) observance of the Sabbath was so strict that the Jews allowed themselves to be slaughtered on that day rather than take up arms to defend themselves. Realizing that such an attitude could mean their extinction, the Jews determined to fight if attacked again on the Sabbath. The Talmud sanctioned this decision and said that 39 general categories of forbidden works were suspended when life or health were seriously endangered, for “the Sabbath was given to man, not man to the Sabbath.”

In the synagogue a portion of the Torah is read during the morning service, followed by the chanting of the Haftara (a selection from the prophets). Psalms are also part of the day’s liturgy. During the morning Sabbath service, a Jewish boy whose 13th birthday has occurred during the previous week customarily celebrates his Bar Mitzvah (religious adulthood) and may chant the Haftara.

In Jewish homes the woman of the house lights white Sabbath candles before sunset on Friday evening and pronounces a benediction. The Sabbath meal that follows is preceded by the Qiddush (blessing of sanctification). An abbreviated Qiddush is recited the next morning before breakfast, which is taken after the service. A special blessing (Havdala), emphasizing the idea of separation (between the Sabbath and weekdays, between the sacred and the profane, and between light and darkness), concludes the Sabbath.

In modern times Orthodox Jews strive to observe the Sabbath with full solemnity. Conservative Jews vary in their practice, some seeking certain modifications to permit, for instance, travel on the Sabbath. Reform Jews, in some cases, hold synagogue services on Sunday. Among post-Reformation Christians, a few groups, such as the Seventh-day Adventists, observe Saturday as their day of rest and worship.

A number of Sabbaths during the Jewish religious year have distinctive designations. Four occur between the end of Shevat (fifth month of the Jewish civil year) and the first day of Nisan (seventh month). The specific name of each of these Sabbaths is related to an additional reading from the Torah (first five books of the Old Testament) that replaces on that day the Maftir (last portion of the assigned Torah reading). For each of these four Sabbaths there is also a distinctive Haftara.

Sheqalim (“shekels”), occurring on or before Adar I, refers to taxes and has as its text Exodus 30:11–16. On Zakhor (“remember”), Deuteronomy 25:17–19 reminds Jews how they were attacked by Amalek in the wilderness after their Exodus from Egypt. This Sabbath precedes the festival of Purim. On Para (“red heifer”), Numbers 19:1–22 admonishes the Jews to be ritually pure for the approaching festival of Passover (Pesah). Ha-Hodesh (“the month”) falls shortly before Passover; the text is from Exodus 12:1–20. These four Sabbaths are known by the collective Hebrew name *arba‘ parashiyyot* (“four [Bible] readings”). The Sabbath that immediately precedes Passover is called Shabbat ha-Gadol (“great Sabbath”).

Three other Sabbaths are designated by a key word from the Haftara chanted on that day: Shabbat Hazon (Isaiah 1:1), preceding the 9th day of Av (Tisha be-Av)—a fast day; Shabbat Naḥamu (Isaiah 40:1) following the 9th of Av; and Shabbat Shuva (Hosea 14:2), immediately preceding Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement).

Finally, there are Shabbat Bereshit (“Sabbath of the beginning”), when the annual cycle of Torah readings recommences with Genesis 1; Shabbat Shira (“Sabbath song”), when the triumphal song of Moses is read from Exodus 15; and the two Sabbaths of *ḥol ha-mo‘ed* (“intermediate days”), falling between the initial and final days of the Passover and Sukkot festivals.

Citation Information

Article Title: Sabbath

Website Name: Encyclopaedia Britannica

Publisher: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.

Date Published: 26 February 2020

URL: <https://www.britannica.com><https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sabbath-Judaism>

Access Date: November 07, 2022